



# UNDERSTANDING THE VARIED FACETS OF FEMINISM IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS AND HOME

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## ABSTRACT

One of the most heatedly disputed literary subjects in the world is feminism. There is a distinct branch of feminist authors in Indian English literature due to the wave's profound influence on Indian English writers, particularly women writers. Women have undergone significant transformation in post-independence Indian English literature. Instead of being reserved or silent, people now step out, defending their rights and expressing their uniqueness. One of the real feminists writing modern Indian English literature is Manju Kapur. She belongs to a group of female writers who discuss the status of women and explore many feminism-related topics, including psychological analyses of their female characters. This article aims to look at Manju Kapur's two novels, *Difficult Daughters* and *Home*, through the lens of feminism and see how her feminist perspective differs from that of Western feminism and even her contemporaries.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism, Feminist, New Women, Post-Independence Era, Patriarchy, Societal Norms.

## INTRODUCTION

The word "feminism," which refers to the support of equal rights, position, and authority for both men and women, is derived from the Latin word "Femina," which means "woman." Alternatively, it alludes to the idea that men and women should have the same social, economic, and political rights. The early twentieth-century fights in the Western world for women's suffrage or voting rights and the subsequent, well-organized socio-political movement for women's emancipation from patriarchal oppression contributed to the term's rise to prominence. The women's liberation movement of the late 1960s was a major catalyst for the development of the modern feminism philosophy, which emphasized the female voice. "Women's writing became the focus of literary studies, with the goal of re-reading, revising, and re-interpreting it in light of long-standing gender bias and sexual politics" (Warhol 35).<sup>1</sup>

In English, contemporary Indian women authors share their ideas and describe how they deal with emotional and physical demands. Women and men speak about love, passion, sexuality, and marriage relationships in addition to other parts of their lives, which has been noticed. It is observed that "Modern Indian women writers have articulated as overtly and boldly as male writers in the post-independence period" (Dinesh 12).<sup>2</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Kavitha K. and Shobana M. (2018)**<sup>3</sup> explored a topic entitled "The Portrayal of Women in the Select Novels of Manju Kapur". The scholars conclude that Manju Kapur highlights how women in Indian culture are mistreated under the guise of patriarchy or tradition in the current work. The mother's dominance is more pronounced than the father's in her works. They work to define themselves and establish their uniqueness despite their challenges.

**Krishna, Prasad (2019)**<sup>4</sup> published an article titled "A Feminist Study of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*". Post-modern trends have recently been reflected in English-language writing by Indians. This paves the way for the formation of new socio-cultural and political circumstances in which the marginalized—or the extremely marginalized—are brought to the fore. Feminism is the outcome of such a worldview and is a side consequence of postmodernism. A Married Women has a complex organizational scheme. From Astha's early twenties through her early middle years, her life is followed. She falls in love with a few young men of her choosing throughout this time, falls in love with a man of her parents' choosing, gets married, has intimate moments with her spouse, has children, but grows distant from him, and strives to become a painter, much like her western counterparts. She represents middle-class values and seems to enjoy her mental pleasure initially, but she soon concludes that something is lacking in her life.

**M. Karunakaran (2020)**<sup>5</sup> published a paper entitled "Journey of a Woman and a Nation towards the Search of Self-Esteem in Manju Kapur's Novels." In search of self-esteem, a lady and a country travel in this article on Manju Kapur's novels. She describes how Indian women are kept uninformed of education and Independence, illustrating how vulnerable they are in Indian society. Indian men first realized the need for female education after the British conquest, but they lost interest after a while. Consequently, the position of women has remained mostly intact even after 65 years of Indian Independence. So, from Independence to the present, Manju Kapur's publications cover the situation of women's education. All of Kapur's books centre on the difficulty and suffering women

experience in forging their identities.

According to the literature study, most of Kapur's books deal with feminist ideology, which is a difficult topic to tackle nowadays, especially in Indian English fiction. However, since feminism has so many sides, the researcher will attempt to emphasize a variety of them in the current work.

## The Varied Perspectives of Feminism in *Difficult Daughters*

Manju Kapur believes achieving self-awareness, self-identity, and self-respect will liberate women. Moreover, she thinks a woman should be capable of providing for herself. Her novel, *Difficult Daughters* is based partly on her own life and depicts the many challenges that the lead character, Virmati, struggles to further her education while upholding her traditions.

The narrative depicts a civilization in which dignity wins over melancholy and familial happiness in the towns of Amritsar and Lahore as they experience partition. Three generations, Kasturi, Virmati, and Ida stand in for the three phases of Indian Independence. Kasturi is shown as a pre-independence lady who yields to the violent dominance of patriarchy. She embodies motherhood and is a lady who can endure suffering. She lived her life in service of her family.

Virmati is a generalized representation of the struggle for Independence. She exhibits her rebellious nature by disobeying traditional morals, which is unusual for a girl. She travels the path that leads to one's individuality, but it ends for her in the middle with no success. On the other side, a woman might be liberated by her image. Ida, the third generation, was born after India gained its freedom and grew up to be a strong, independent woman. She embarks on a journey to better understand her mother and fight against her habits and foolishness. Her quest for autonomy and uniqueness, as well as her isolation from her family to focus on her studies, is highlighted in the novel. She is compelled to want to be a surrogate mother. And the reason for Virmati's mother's repeated procreation is what irks her. She is unable ever to enjoy freedom. She frequently yearns for her mother's love:

When she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in her mother's arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. 'Have you seen to their food- milk- clothes-studies? Do you think there is all the time for sitting around, doing nothing? You know they don't listen to her. You are the eldest. If you don't see to things, who will?' (*Difficult Daughters* 6-7)<sup>6</sup>

Virmati wants to be independent, rebellious, and violent like her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala plants the seeds of Independence in Virmati. She sees her as a contemporary woman who challenges gender stereotypes that limit a daughter to early marriage, followed by a home and family. She encourages Virmati to fight for freedom and gender equality by recalling the post-colonially emancipated "New Woman." The new woman disobeys the rules of the custom-bound society.

Shakuntala is portrayed as a freedom fighter who takes part in the political Gandhian Movement, whereas Kasturi is traditional and constrained by patriarchy and thinks that every girl must marry rather than study. Shakuntala and Virmati break out of this conventional system of being typical Indian women. Shakuntala, on the other hand, comes out as a young woman who agrees

with Virmati on issues with which Lajwanti and Kasturi vehemently disagree. They hold that only men are free to work, go outside, and do whatever they like, but women must always abide by social conventions. She believes that women are incapable of making independent judgments.

Virmati declares her wish to be like Shakuntala as soon as she senses her presence. Virmati learns about her feelings and grows to know who she is. Shakuntala's presence motivates Virmati to search for her legitimate place in society. Kasturi thinks that Virmati has finished school, but Virmati wants to continue, even if it means arguing with her mother over household chores. A crucial component of family life is the proper parenting of children. For the benefit of her family, Virmati must forgo her education and the Independence she never had. She has received special training to be the ideal daughter.

Marriage as a social institution devalues women as tradeable commodities and restricts women's ability to give their children the names of their husbands. By Virmati, both institutions are condemned. She rejects prejudices that can endanger the reputation of her family. Virmati selects a professor who is the father of a boy in defiance of her family's expectations that she marry an engineer named Inderjeet. One of his pupils, Virmati, who is committed to her studies, sparks the professor's romantic interest.

The professor is considered to be Virmati's fiancé. She is conscious of his attention being on her. A woman may detect a man's vision using her sixth sense. Her desire to be educated and her want to uphold family, traditions, and norms are at odds with one another. She seemed bewildered every day. The date for Virmati's wedding has been fixed, and she has finished her B.A. The professor tries to convince Virmati of his viewpoints and forces her to admit their connection to Inderjeet. On the other side, Kasturi is often reminding her:

You are the eldest, Viru, and your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father have confidence in you; otherwise, would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. What will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it? (Difficult Daughters 58-59)

She has a modern viewpoint, which is the root of her hostility. However, she finds Shakuntala to be quite inspirational, so she decides to pursue her schooling in Lahore. She tries to commit herself when she cannot come up with a solution to her problem of having to make a decision because she thinks that dying would finally end her worries, but she is saved.

Like an epistolary book, Manju Kapur has dedicated an entire chapter of her novel *Difficult Daughters* to the letters of Virmati and Professor Harish. The professor has Virmati in the thick of his affections while simultaneously having a relationship with his wife. A man cannot simultaneously commit himself to two causes. The professor is intelligent since he doesn't want to leave his beloved and caring wife or child, Viru. Here, the professor's strategy is in doubt.

The professor argues for himself by saying he is trying to bring the family back together. Like Shakuntala, Virmati seeks freedom and autonomy. She is also affected by Swami Lata, a fiercely devoted feminist who drags her along to the Punjab Women's Students Conference and convinces her to join the cause after hearing her speech. She has a gut feeling.

In the "new woman" community and her traditional home, where she feels alone, Virmati finds her identity. She feels that these larger rooms weren't created for her. Instead of Virmati being his wife, the professor truly wants her as a woman to meet his cerebral needs. In contrast, Virmati believes that she and the professor are connected because of their shared academic interests. She also believes that their close closeness makes them stronger when they are together. Manju Kapur has compared Virmati's demeanour to Shakespeare's fool. That, in Virmati's opinion, is the entirety of her karma.

She battles her culture and family but is powerless before Harish's love. She makes unimaginable sacrifices for the sake of her unshakeable convictions. After a string of unfortunate events, Virmati marries the man she loves and moves back to Amritsar to live with him. At the same time, Harish is determined to stick with his first wife. Ganga, Harish's first wife, whose rights have been stolen, is not considered a family member. She is made to live as an outsider in the home. Virmati's story ultimately vanishes into oblivion due to the greater tragedy of separation. Ida noticed how lonely Virmati had been all of her life. Even her daughter does not approve of the way her mother is acting. Even the readers could write her off as a troubled daughter since she defies the norms of a male-dominated society. She is portrayed as a rebellious woman rather than a young, fresh lady.

#### The Varied Perspectives of Feminism in *Home*

*Home* is Kapur's third book, and it is about Banwari Lai's family, including his two sons, Yashpal and Pyarelal, as well as their spouses and children. In the capital of India, Banwari Lai's house was in a middle-class area and radiated wealth and power. Upwardly mobile business people frequent Karol Bagh

Street from society's upper middle caste levels. In addition, Sunita, Banwari Lai's daughter, lives in a small house with betel-stained walls, poor sanitation, and insufficient lighting, which speaks to the confined lifestyle she and her son Vicky lead. Home has received a lot of criticism and controversy for being a feminist work. Therefore, the narrative of Sona and her daughter Nisha becomes a central role in the genealogy of a large business family. The subplot tells the story of Vicky, Banwari Lai's grandson, and Rupa, Sona's sister. Since Sona didn't have a child during the first 10 years of her marriage, she is entangled in a maze of family conflict and disagreements. Infertility is a disaster for a woman who is childless after marriage. Nobody blames the male for a woman's infertility, and only the woman has the power to take action. In this book, Sona experiences a difficult journey through this type of neurology. She finds the transition from the maternal to the marital home challenging because she must observe not only the rules and customs of the patriarchal household but also be conscious of her low socioeconomic status in a family that places a premium on that.

Initially, both sisters are infertile, which leaves them open to attack. However, Sona is soon blessed with a child, just as she had planned. Rupa continues to have infertility. Home, however, demonstrates Nisha's development as a person. Nisha's life, struggles, and successes are chronicled throughout the book. Her cousin Vicky takes advantage of her from when she is very little. While preparing for her B.A. final, she has a romantic relationship with Suresh, a lower caste person. Although the lad is eager to embrace her despite her position as a "Manglik," her family won't accept that he loves her. Nisha is gorgeous and hails from an established family. The first woman from the Banwari Lai family to be promoted for marriage is Nisha. Her parents also want to marry off their daughter into a happy family so she can live a long life. It is clear from this that her family cares about caste, community, and similarity standards.

Nisha's marriage is postponed due to her "mangalik" horoscopes. Sona is unhappy with the change in her life that Nisha has brought about by starting her own clothing design business. That woman thinks her home is where her "honour" is. On the other hand, her father, Pyarelal, provides her with commercial facilities and business expertise. Because of her misfortune, Nisha is the only one who can launch her business. Without much consideration for the prospective spouses, marriages are planned to increase the house's wealth and prominence. There is the outside world for those who wish to expand their businesses. The long-standing tradition is disregarded when Nisha is taken to remain at Rupa's house and is not allowed to leave. Nisha makes her way back to her childhood home after eleven years. She has some independence while at college, but she must pay the price because her relationship with Suresh, a person from a lower caste, cannot last. Her actions are closely scrutinized, and every step she makes on the outside is targeted as if she were in prison. Now that she has wed Arvind, her future appears to be more promising. Neither Arvind nor Nisha saw their marriage as a vehicle for love or personal fulfilment but rather as a necessity.

Arvind must marry, the old mother must have someone to look after her, it is not right the place is so empty, the son is busy in the shop, someone should be there to see, notice, care, and where are the children going to come from? Myriad relatives were quoted; all of them had said the same thing year in and year out. Their words eddied gently around them while Arvind went on eating and did not look up. (Home 323)<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of the marriage is achieved when Nisha gives birth to twins after 10 months of marriage. But instead, she forfeits her ability to make decisions, her financial freedom, and her own business.

#### CONCLUSION

It may be inferred from the events in the books that not all women aspire to be on an equal footing with men, but rather that they want to be acknowledged as subjects, and subjectivity can mean different things to different individuals. Internalized patriarchal beliefs significantly impact living conditions for women. If women bring these principles to the forefront, their search for liberty could advance. According to research on these works, women are capable of immense power, but the problem is that they often become trapped in patriarchy's web and lose sight of it. They all must progress toward self-realization, but everyone's journey is different.

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